

REMARKS

Interview Summary

The Examiner is thanked for the courtesies extended to Applicants' representative during a personal interview held on March 23, 2005. A proposed amendment (with proposed Claims 1, 6, 19 and 20 being in their currently presented form, except for a minor grammatical change to Claim 19) was discussed. The Examiner indicated that the previously filed Claim 15 should have been allowable over the prior art of record and that the amended Claims 1, 6, 19 and 20 appear to be patentable over the prior art of record, subject to new searching.

Response

Claims 1-23 are pending in the present application. Claims 1-3, 6, 7, 13, 15-18 and 20-23 stand rejected and Claims 14 and 19 have been objected to. Claims 4, 5 and 8-12 have been allowed. Claims 1, 6, 19 and 20 have been amended herein. Reconsideration is respectfully requested in light of the present amendments and following remarks. The above amendments and following remarks are believed to be fully responsive to the outstanding Office Action and to render all claims at issue patentably distinct over the references cited.

The Examiner has rejected Claims 6 and 7 under 35 U.S.C. §102(e) as allegedly being anticipated by Just et al. (U.S. Patent No. 6,443,517). This rejection is respectfully traversed. It is believed that the originally filed claims are patentably distinct over the cited reference. Notwithstanding and without admitting whether Just et al. is or

is not prior art, independent Claim 6 has been amended to state that a majority of the bulkhead panel member is oriented along a generally vertical plane. Support for this amendment can be found within Applicants' originally filed Figures 3-5 and the accompanying text. It should be appreciated that the bulkhead panel member may be somewhat angularly offset from the vertical plane as long as it is more vertical than not. In contrast, the cited references does not teach the presently claimed combination of features, especially as amended. Accordingly, it is respectfully requested that the instant rejection be withdrawn.

Claims 1, 2, 15, 16, 18, 20 and 22 stand rejected under 35 U.S.C. §103(a) as allegedly being unpatentable over Just et al. in view of Willard (U.S. Patent No. 6,497,447). This rejection is respectfully traversed. It is believed that the originally filed claims are patentably distinct over the cited references. Notwithstanding, the independent Claim 1 has been amended to state that a modular support member acts as a seat back panel. Support for this amendment can be found within Applicants' originally filed paragraph number [0016]. In contrast, the cited references do not disclose the presently claimed combination of elements. For example, the cited references do not disclose the "substantially vertically planar orientation" of the panel in Claim 15. The differences of the seat back panel and/or verticality are significant in vehicular construction and function. Accordingly, it is respectfully requested that the instant rejection be withdrawn.

Claim 3 has been rejected under 35 U.S.C. §103(a) as allegedly being unpatentable over Just et al. in view of Wolf et al. (U.S. Patent No. 5,881,458). Furthermore, Claim 13 has been rejected under 35 U.S.C. §103(a) as allegedly being

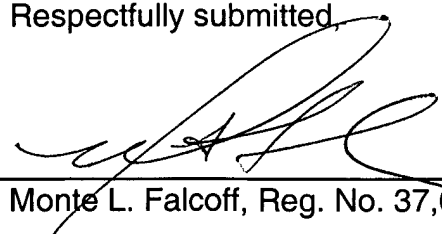
unpatentable over Just et al. in view of Neubrand (U.S. Patent No. 6,217,104). The Examiner has rejected Claims 17 and 23 under 35 U.S.C. §103(a) as allegedly being unpatentable over Just et al., Willard and Neubrand. Moreover, Claim 21 has been rejected under 35 U.S.C. §103(a) as allegedly being unpatentable over Just et al., Willard and the 2001 Ford Mustang reference. These rejection are respectfully traversed. It is believed that the originally filed claims are patentably distinct over the cited references. Notwithstanding, these rejections are deemed moot in light of the amendments and/or arguments regarding the base independent claims. Accordingly, it is respectfully requested that the instant rejections be withdrawn.

Finally, objected to dependent Claim 19 has been amended place it in allowable form by including most of the features from its base independent claim but without the vertical panel feature. It is also noted that the finality of the prior office action should be withdrawn due to the allowability of at least the previously filed independent Claim 15.

In view of the instant amendments, it is submitted that the present application is in condition for allowance. Accordingly, it is requested that the Examiner pass the case to issue at his earliest convenience.

Respectfully submitted,

Dated: April 12, 2005

By: 
Monte L. Falcoff, Reg. No. 37,617

HARNESS, DICKEY & PIERCE, P.L.C.
P.O. Box 828
Bloomfield Hills, Michigan 48303
(248) 641-1600

MLF/cmg